

CoGeneral Presbyters Report – Discipleship, I

For Presbytery Meeting, May 21-22, 2010 Geyser, Lewistown, Roy and Stanford -Hosts

Our Yellowstone Presbytery vision statement is a call to each of us – commissioners and congregations --to intentionally intensify our spiritual journey with Christ-following discipleship. During a sermon a pastor once asked the congregation, “If you are a Christian, please raise your hand,” and all hands went up. Then the minister asked, “If you are a disciple of Jesus, please raise your hand.” A few hands went up. Why the difference? What is the difference between how we may think about being a Christian and what Christ meant that we are to be his disciples? How would you answer?

Across the PCUSA there is a call sounding for discipleship. In her hopes for our denomination listed in the January 10, 2010 issue of the Outlook, Linda Valentine, Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council said that in this current decade she hopes to see the Church grow “‘deep and wide’ – meaning in service, diversity, discipleship, and evangelism.” Eric Hoey, Director of the Office of Evangelism and Church for the PCUSA, wrote in his article (Outlook January 10, 2010), Key to Evangelism: Falling in Love Again, “We hope that our churches will focus on making disciples rather than merely members of a church...”

Do you long to be more of who Christ intended you to be, do you want to become a better, more effective leader and develop better leaders in your congregation? While the quality of leadership does determine the reach and vitality of a congregation, “the quality of the church’s leadership is directly proportional to the quality of its discipleship.”(The Forgotten Ways:Reactivating the MISSIONAL Church, Alan Hirsch). Our leadership crisis is really about our discipleship crisis, what Dallas Willard refers to as “The Great Omission” in the American church today!

Yet, as the Chinese character for crisis so profoundly teaches, crisis is not only about danger, it is about opportunity. For us, God’s opportunity.

So how would you answer? What is a disciple and how does the church make them?

Our faith journeys are different. Even within the presbytery our historic and traditional roots vary. So some of the ways we live out our discipleship and some of the elements we emphasize will vary. But certain characteristics of discipleship will be common to us all. These, we must study, focus on and encourage in one another. We would probably all name additional commonalities, but here are five foundational ones we think are for all disciples. A disciple of Christ:

1. Answers “Yes” to the call of Jesus, “Follow and obey me.” “ If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23; Matt. 10:38; 4:18-22, John 14:21, etc.)
2. Begins to intentionally cooperate with the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit in transforming her/his mind, values, behavior and habits, and relationships to more and more closely be conformed to the life of Christ. by Scripture, prayer and spiritual disciplines/practices, As Mother Teresa said, “We must become holy not because we want to feel holy but because Christ must be able to live his life fully in us.” (Matt. 5-7; Rom. 12:1,2; II Cor. 3:17, 18; Eph 3 & 4; Col.1-3...)
3. Is part of and formed in committed relationships in Christian community with other disciples, in shared experiences and ongoing practices of worship, mission and service, prayer and study of Scripture, and living in ways as Christian community which demonstrate God’s intent for the world (Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in MISSIONAL Faithfulness, Barrett, ch.4).
4. Empowered by the Holy Spirit is sent, going out to join Christ’s mission in the community & world, embodying and proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed, making disciples, reproducing! (Mt 25, 28; John 14:10-14)

5. Becomes known for the fruit of the Spirit, the character, ways of Christ, especially his/her love for others in fellowship in the church and in service and evangelism outside the church. This, because she/he has experienced the transforming love and grace of God personally (Gal. 5; John 13:35, 35; 1 John 4:7-12).

A disciple, then, is an intentional follower of Christ and whose life is being transformed by God's Spirit to increasingly become like Christ in thought, word and deed, maturing spiritually until he/she dies and completes the discipleship journey in heaven. What do you think of this definition of Discipleship? What would you add/subtract? Does it describe you and the people in your congregation? To what degree?

So we've opened this important discussion by asking, "What is a Disciple?" The Presbytery's mission statement, quoting Jesus, calls all of us to be disciples and to "encourage and equip disciple-making leaders and congregations" in Yellowstone Presbytery. It is exciting to see this happening here in Yellowstone, life-giving expressions of discipleship. In response would you do at least one of the following:

1. Watch for the launch and blog with us and others across the presbytery online at [Disciplemakings...](#)
2. Study and discussion discipleship in your session, classes, groups and committees, as part of your mission and service. You might use the presbytery's vision statement to begin the discussion. Study Scripture as to what Christ means a disciple of Christ is and how the church makes and sends disciples as a part of ALL it IS and DOES. You might ask George or Kathy or another leader to come engage the session in further study and discussion.
3. Study and discuss discipleship in a group of clergy/clp's and let it merge into a how you all might mutually disciple one another.

Books have been written about how Christ disciplined the twelve. Books are being written today about how the Church, in the Holy Spirit, can be disciple-making, disciple sending disciples and contrast communities of disciples in our culture today. There is so much more to say, discern as we wrestle and learn together on this all-important topic. Our faithfulness and future depend on it!

God's Spirit fill, transform and overflow us for God's glory this Pentecost and every day,

George and Kathy Goodrich